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ABSTRACT

To achieve educational improvement, educational leaders must change from being uninvolved and apathetic to being involved and concerned, and plan for the future at the same time they work out the present. A council on the development of human qualities should be created within each community. This council would include all the behavioral, medical, public service, family agency, police, and educational authorities concerned with life in that community. An improved educational program would involve the community as a learning laboratory, consider learning to be a lifetime activity, and cooperate with the people to plan and develop a community-centered educational program. (MLF)

COMMUNITY-CENTERED EDUCATION - ONE RESPONSE TO CRITICS OF EDUCATION

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by

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One of the most popular lines of attack to take today is that we are in a crisis situation destined for total annihilation if we don't change or cause a revolution.

I have been asked to talk today about "Uptight Clients" and "Effective Responses to Critics of Education". I do not think that we, as educators, exist in a crisis with respect to the clients we serve or with respect to the responses we are capable of giving to our critics.

I would rather say that I am very optimistic about the possibilities for today's educational establishment. Traveling around the country and talking with today's educational leaders, I find them to be enthusiastic and dedicated people.

That change in the establishment has occurred in some parts of the country cannot be denied. That there is a desire to do a better job in all communities cannot be denied either. The process of moving from what I call the Wizard of Oz stage of education to community-centered education is what I would like to discuss with you today.

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Let me first of all illustrate education as I believe it existed in the Wizard of Oz stage. I am sure you all remember this childhood novel in which the main actors

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were Dorothy, her friend the dog Toto, the scarecrow, the tin woodsman and the cowardly lion. This group traveled together through many experiences which culminated in the meeting of the great Oz. It was their hope that the great Oz would grant them each one wish - send Dorothy and Toto back to their home in Kansas, give the tin woodsman a heart, the scarecrow brains, and grant the cowardly lion courage.

The frustrations felt by Dorothy and her friends as they journeyed to the land of Oz may well be correlated to the many frustrations felt by today's education public, who are attempting to do two important things in their lives. First of all, to understand the educational mazes, including the jargon and shop talk, that are placed before them daily, and secondly, to negotiate their entrance into a social institution which, in their perception, is hostile towards them.

Dorothy and her friends finally, after much despair and frustration, had the opportunity to meet Oz. In their first meeting with Oz they all reported having met a different kind of Oz. Dorothy saw a fireball, and the others their very own weird perceptions. However, each presented their wishes to Oz. Oz's next step was to set up further mazes and frustrations for Dorothy and her friends. In essence he set up the conditions for a hostile relationship. The crux of the matter was that Oz could not make good on all the promises he had made. Like Oz, we as educators have made many promises on which we could not make good.

What I am suggesting is that we have set up conditions which, in many cases, have provided people with valid reasons to become uptight. Often educators perceive this "uptightness" in negative ways, such as defeat at the polls of important tax issues relating to education. We see the result, attempt to treat the symptom, but seldom discover the cause.

At this point, let me suggest that these taxpayers - these so-called critics of education - are not the only individuals who are uptight. We in education are also uptight.

Now the question becomes - what do we mean by uptight? Let me suggest that for purposes of this discussion "uptight" means a basic mistrust or fear about change.

Albert Ellis in his book, How To Live With A Neurotic, states: "Change virtually by definition requires effort, and effort requires a goal, an idea, a concept. It is the concept, therefore, that things can be better than they are, that they can be changed, that's the very essence of change itself."

While we may well desire to have our clients change and become less uptight, are we as educators willing to change equally as much as we expect our clients to change; and are we willing to take the risks inherent in helping to plan for that change?

The question then becomes - in what areas do we need to consider change? The first area of change for educational leaders and critics alike is to move from the uninvolved-

apathetic to the involved-concerned. A recent popular song stated my position this way:

"Beneath the spreading mushroom tree the world revolves in apathy
as overhead a row of specks roars on drowned out by discotheques,
and if a secret button's pressed because one man's been outguessed -
Who Will Answer?"

"Is our hope in walnut shells worn round the neck with temple bells
or deep within some cloistered walls where hooded figures pray in
halls, of crumpled books on dusty shelves or in the stars or in our-
selves - Who Will Answer?"

It seems to me that for the past few hundred years the common reply to the question of Who Will Answer has been "wait and see" or "time will tell". I, like many of you in this room, heard these cliches from my parents, teachers, government leaders and church representatives. Well, time has passed and the same problems not only still exist but they have multiplied in their intensity and in their ability to destroy - Who Will Answer?

The second major area of change which needs to occur among educational leaders and critics is to begin thinking beyond just today. Dr. Doxiadis has stated the problem in the following way:

"Dealing merely with the present is unrealistic because by the time we have analyzed the situation, defined our problems, and planned how to meet them, the present has become the past; by the time we are ready to act and create new conditions, the present is a distant past."

We cannot just operate on a day-to-day crisis basis nor can we attempt to solve all of the world's problems of which we are aware. We must both plan for the future and solve those problems which are within our reach.

I am suggesting that the common denominator for man in a complex society is his community. We do not ignore the problems of the world, rather we place them in perspective and relate them to our own communities. We do this whether we are dealing with the problems of affluent Grosse Point, Michigan or the problems of the illiterate adult in Harlem. We begin by utilizing the resources available within our communities, drawing upon outside resources only when necessary.

What I am proposing is the creation within each community of a legitimate council on the development of human qualities. This council would include, among others, all the behavioral, medical, public service, family agency, police and educational authorities concerned with living in that community.

The creation of these councils would allow us to reduce our problems to their lowest common denominators - our own communities. With these problems reduced to a manageable level, we will not spin our wheels discussing global problems which we do not have the resources to solve; rather we can move ahead to plan and develop good communities.

Dr. Donald O. Bush has defined a good community in the following manner: "A group of people interacting with resources (time, energy, things) to sustain life, the residue of which leaves each succeeding generation richer in human resources. A bad community would result in lack of satisfaction and no worthwhile residue."

The third change area for educators and critics of education centers around the utilization of the resources Dr. Bush described in defining a good community - time, energy and things.

At this point, let me refer specifically to the social institution which most of you represent - education. In today's modern complex society the school as a social institution is obligated to help people help themselves. The modern school is organized to achieve this goal. The educational program should serve as a catalyst to encourage individual learning.

In order to achieve this goal - helping people help themselves - the educational leader must take the following steps:

1. Perceive the community as a learning laboratory. We need to admit that all "good" education does not necessarily occur in the typical 900 square foot classroom. The entire community must be utilized as "the school".

2. Accept the premise that learning is a life-time activity. Learning does not begin on September 1 at age 5 and end on June 10 at age 21. Learning begins at birth and ends at death and the school system must play a vital role in allocating its resources to help people help themselves.

3. Educational leaders must accept the involvement of all people affected in the issues of the times. Our time and energy must be re-directed towards this objective. We have passed the stage of professing all knowledge and making everyone's decisions.

Specifically, the response educational leaders must be capable of making to their critics is this - we have a given amount of time, energy and resources available to this community. We alone are not able to solve all of the problems of this community. We will cooperate with all people in this community to plan and develop a community-centered educational program.

The broadest view we could take requires that schools be open and staffed 24 hours a day, 6 days each week and for 52 weeks in the year. Normally, schools that operate on a broad basis are open and staffed from 14 to 16 hours each of the 6 days in the

week and each week in the year. Such schools are available for use by everyone in the community without regard for age, race, religion, or socioeconomic circumstances. The school takes the lead in getting all people of the community to consider the school as a common meeting house and service center. The learning needs of older people are provided for quite as extensively as those of children and youth.

The curriculum of the broad view school is a continuum for old and young alike from early morning until late evening, through Saturdays and summer weeks. Curriculum is looked upon as the means for bringing about changes in people. Change may occur in many forms and areas and is not restricted as to time. Hence, any activity conducted during any segment which brings about change in anyone is one element of the continuous curriculum.

From the broad view, all people who use the school facilities for learning purposes are members of the student body. Hence a 75-year-old woman who studies ceramic art at 8 o'clock in the evening is as much a member of the student body as is her granddaughter who studies arithmetic at 10 o'clock in the morning. By this concept, the total student body of the "broad based" school may be twice as large or more than twice as large as the number of children and youth who are required to go to school.

During a certain year in a midwestern city, the school enrollment of children and youth was 41,000. During the voluntary segments of the school day, 81,000 children,

youth and adults used the school facilities in a single week.

The broad view school is generally referred to as the "community school" because it involves people of all ages and circumstances in the entire community.

As I said earlier, you must be willing to accept the risks involved in this approach. If your security is achieved from locked school buildings after 3:30 p.m.; if your custodian's security comes from clean floors at 5:00 p.m.; and if a teacher's security comes from knowing "my" room will not be disturbed - then your critics' voices will become much louder than they are at present.

In a recent editorial in the Saturday Review it was stated, "In certain respects riots are the ultimate criticism of an educational system and of the society that it represents. Yet if schools can teach despair and frustration, they can also teach optimism and hope." Those of us in education must believe that we can teach optimism and hope better than despair and frustration. We need to involve all our clients in this educational process - adults, senior citizens, dropouts, and migrants.

I am confident that each of you is equal to the task at hand.

Thank you.